DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 080 155 PS 006 633

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TITLE A Study of Race and Class Heterogeneity Among Preschool Children.
PUB DATE 2 Apr 71
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 2, 1971)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Patterns; Caucasians; *Childhood Attitudes; Interaction Process Analysis; Negro Youth; Play; *Preschool Children; *Racial Attitudes; *Socioeconomic Status; Technical Reports
IDENTIFIERS *Picture Sociometric test; RAFT Test

ABSTRACT

An experimental preschool was set up to study the effect of mixing children differing in SES and race on racial awareness and interaction. It was hypothesized that racial self-selection could be explained in terms of SES level and that interracial contact when different SES children were included would serve to counteract racial stereotypes and self-selection. Ss were 30 children in two classrooms. The classrooms were comprised of 13 Black (B) and 17 White (W) children, 17 Middle Income (M) and 13 Lower Income (L) children, and 15 each males and females. The children were given a Picture-Sociometric Test and RAFT test early in the school year and at the end of the year. Results show that the M children seemed to have been chosen as playmates significantly more than their L counterparts. There were no differences in the frequency with which B or W children are chosen as playmates. M children are chosen with the greatest frequency with a slightly greater tendency for the MW children to be chosen according to sociometric results. (Author/CK)

A Study of Race and Class Heterogeneity Among Preschool Children *

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Abstract

An experimental preschool was set up to study the effect of mixing children differing in SES and race on racial awareness and interaction. It was hypothesized that racial self-selection could be explained in terms of SES level. It was further hypothesized that interracial contact when different SES children were included would serve to counteract racial stereotypes and self-selection.

Thirty children in two classrooms participated in the experimental preschool. The classrooms were comprised of 13 Black (B) and 17 White (W) children, 17 Middle Income (M) and 13 Lower Income (L) children, and 15 each males and females. The children were given a Picture-Sociometric Test and a RAFT test early in the school year and again at the end of the school year. In addition, observations were made to determine what inter-group play patterns existed in the classrooms. Finally, teachers made judgments of each child's preferred playmate. Thus, it was possible to make comparisons among these various measures in order to determine the suitability of their use for studying social interaction.

Results of the observations show that the M children seemed to have been chosen as playmates significantly more than their L counterparts.

* Paper presented at biennial meeting of SRCD, Minneapolis, Minn., April, 2, 1971

There were no differences in the frequency with which B or W children are chosen as playmates. The Sociometric results indicate that, in general, the M children are chosen with the greatest frequency with a slightly greater tendency for the MW children to be chosen. Teachers' judgments, on the other hand, indicated that the children chose within social class at the beginning of the year although not at the end of the year.

In general, the findings were that more contact is not sufficient to influence the development of pre-social intergroup attitudes and behaviors. The discrepancy between the child response and observational data and the teacher judgments suggests that efforts must be made to provide facilitating experiences in racially and otherwise mixed classrooms aimed at the development of pre-social attitudes.

Results are interpreted in terms of Allport's and Stuart Cook's conditions for racial attitude change which previously had been thought to be inappropriate for young children's social interactions.

A Study of Race and Class Heterogeneity Among Preschool Children

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In 1971, 17 years after the Supreme Court decision to desegregate the public schools, a substantial portion of the schools in all parts of the country remain racially segregated. Many reasons might be given for this continued state of affairs including bigotry, housing patterns, reluctance to change and others. The present authors feel that the attainment of racial and intergroup understanding is a necessary goal in the achievement of a truly pluralistic society. Communication among different groups is a necessary means to achieving that goal.

The recent White House Conference issued as one of its major directives the elimination of racism. Certainly one way in which we can begin to accomplish this is through complete and sincere integration of public schools.

To be sure, school desegregation will bring together not only children of different racial groups but also children from different socioeconomic levels. What is the effect of this sort of heterogeneity on intergroup attitudes?

Past research in the area of intergroup attitudes suggests that as children get older their attitudes toward minority groups become more crystallized. Prejudice seems to increase with age. Mary Ellen Goodman's analysis of racial attitude development sees the preschool period as the time of racial awareness, the earliest level of racial attitude formation. A recent review of the effects of intergroup contact by Amir suggests that such contact has both positive and negative consequences as possible alternatives.

Thus, it is not clear what the consequences of providing both interracial and inter-SES contact for intergroup attitudes and behavior are. Some evidence suggests that even preschool children will segregate themselves racially on sociometric measures—blacks choosing blacks, whites choosing whites. Although it has also been observed that in actual interactions the children will not demonstrate such segregations.

Two basic questions are being asked. What is the effect of providing an opportunity for contact between black and white children of both middle and lower SES levels? And especially, what happens in this respect when this situation exists for preschool-age children who would be expected to show individual racial attitudes? That is, although it is believed that interracial contact is necessary but not sufficient for the formation of healthy intergroup attitudes—is this also true when such contact occurs in the context of heterogeneous social class groupings. The data to be presented here should be taken as an exploratory study and only illustrative of the kind of research which needs to be done in this area.

Method

Thirty children in two preschool classrooms were given a picture sociometric test and a picture racial attitudes test early in the school year and again at the end of the school year. Observations were made of the children early in the school year only. Teachers were asked to make judgments of children's choices in the sociometric.

Subjects

The Ss consisted of 17 middle-income children (roughly defined by three criteria of father's occupation, family income, and parents' education), 10 of these were white, 7 of them were black, and 13 lower-income

children, 7 white and 6 black. Mean age at the beginning of the year was 4 years 5 months. No IQ measures were taken. Middle-income children were recruited from a waiting list, lower-income children were recruited from two non-adjacent inner-city neighborhoods.

Sociometric Test

The play-situation picture sociometric test devised by Bogei was given to each child. This consisted of showing each child drawn pictures of play activities and asking him to choose one he wanted to do very much. Then he was shown an array of photographs of the children in the class and asked first to find his own photograph and remove it from the array. Then he was asked to find the picture of the child he would like to play with most in the activity he had chosen. These choices were tabulated according to the social class and racial description of the subjects and their choices. (Test-retest percent of agreement was .78.) Teachers for the respective classrooms were asked to make judgments of the children's choices. These were tabulated in a similar way.

RAPT

The Racial Attitudes Pictures Test was designed to get a measure of each child's attitude toward black children and white children. The children were shown four photographs of children they did not know. Two of the photographs were of black children and two were of white children. For each presentation, the child was asked to make a series of eight judgments about the child in the photograph. These judgments were presented as bi-polar opposite adjectives taken from among those used for the evaluative dimension on the semantic differential. In each case, the subject was

referred to the photograph in question and asked whether he thought the child in the photograph was more like one or more like the other of the adjectives. (Test-retest reliability on this measure was .68.)

Teacher's Judgments

In order to better study the relationship between the sociometric choices of the children, observations of their behavior and the results of the CIGAT, the teachers of each of the rooms were asked to estimate what the children's responses would be on the sociometric based on their own observations. Thus, each teacher was asked to judge whom each child would pick as the one he liked best, the one he wanted to play with most, and the one he disliked most. This was done at the same time as the testing.

Observations

Early in the school year (first month) two observers watched the children playing from behind one-way screens. They recorded verbatim into tape recorders everything a particular child did, with whom, and for how long. Due to the uncontrollable circumstances, exigencies of budget and time, these observations could only be made once. For each child, six samples of five minutes each were made to yield a total of thirty minutes of observed behavior for each child. These observations were then tabulated in order to find out with whom each of the children had played during the observed periods. Tabulations of the interrace and interclass play patterns were made and presented in contingency tables.

Results

Table 1 shows the results based on the observations. It is clear that there is no pattern of choice of playmates by race and social class.

When this table is collapsed (Table 2) across the whole sample we can see that there was a marked and significant preference to play with middle-class children although no differential play preference between racial grouping.

Table 3 shows the distribution of choices on the pre- and post-sociometric tests. Again there does not seem to be any pattern to be seen which both race and social class designations might account for.

Tables 4 and 5 show the same results collapsed in a variety of ways. Table 4 shows that while there is a significantly uneven distribution of choices on the pre but not on the posttest there is no change in choices of lower-income black children. They are chosen by only 6 percent of the children. In Table 5 it can be seen that while initially white children are chosen significantly more than black children, this is not true by the end of the year. Furthermore, there is no significant difference with the frequency of choices of middle-class or lower-class children initially, although on the posttesting there is a trend toward preference for the middle-class children. The teachers' judgments did not show any pattern of race and social class perferences. However, Table 6 shows that initially the teachers saw the children self-selecting by social class; that is, middle-class chose middle class and lower class were seen to choose lower class, while at the final test, though the middle class children still self-selected, the lower class showed no differences and the Chi square is not significant. Table 7 shows the results based on the Attitude measure for the pictures of the black children. This was scored for positive characteristics with a maximum score of 16. The pretest results showed that the lower-class white children showed the lowest number of positive judgments while the middle-class white showed the highest number with the other

two groups in between. Analysis of variance showed that the interaction was significant. A score of 8.00 represented chance responding and only the middle-class white children responded significantly above chance level. The results for the posttest showed no differences indicating a drop in positive evaluations by middle-class white and lower-class black children. The results for evaluations of the pictures of white children showed no differences among the four subgroups on the pre-measures and that the evaluations were significantly above change level. On the posttest the middle class children remained high with scores of about 11.00 while the lower-class children did not differ significantly from chance.

Discussion

Initially, it seems as if social class was quite strongly influential in determining social interactions and judgments among the children. However, it also seems that for the measures where the children made judgments the racial dimension of the photographs was a salient one. While it may be that initially the children did not associate social class with the photos of their peers but did respond in the play situations as evidenced by the observations-by the end of the year the social class dimension may have become associated with the photos. While some moderate changes might be seen in the results presented here, the results showing the lower-class black children being underchosen and the decline in positive evaluation of the black children's photos suggests that the changes may have been only superficial and not sufficiently in the direction of healthy intergroup relations. One might conclude from some of the results that the experience of the heterogeneous classroom situation alone did not provide any positive contribution to the attenuation of racial attitude formation. The fact that the lower-class black children seemed to be almost ignored suggests this.

We think, however, that a strong point must be made. This exploratory study suggests that even with preschool children who have not yet cause to develop strong racial or social class preferences--contact alone cannot serve to counteract the social pressures from without--from the media which will contribute to a lack of understanding and communication. We have no doubts that the teachers in this school program were well intentioned with

regard to their handling of the children in the classroom with regard to social relationships. But we strongly feel that just as we are not satisfied to allow young children to grow intellectually without some programmatic effort; by providing materials without some guidance in using them, we cannot be satisfied to merely desegregate schools and hope for magic--we must do more than group children racially. We also must provide contacts among children of various socioeconomic backgrounds and mount concerted efforts to help them communicate and develop mutual understanding. Stuart Cook and others have talked about conditions for favorable racial attitude change including mutual pursuit of common goals, intimate association, attenuation of stereotypes, equal status in the situation and a favorable social climate.

It appears to us that if indeed these are the important conditions, then certainly we could design programs around them which will lead to favorable inter-group--not just interracial attitude formation.

TABLE 1

Observed frequency of interaction in play; percentage of most frequent contacts according to the race and social class of the subjects and the race and social class of the most frequent playmates.

	Characteristics of Subjects			
Characteristics of Target	Middle Class White	Middle Class Black	Lower Class White	Lower Class Black
Middle-Class White	40	43	43	67
Middle-Class Black	50	29	43	33
Lower-Class White	0	0	14	0
Lower-Class Black	10	29	0	0

TABLE 2

Observed frequency of interaction in play; percentage of most frequent contacts for total sample according to race alone, social class alone, and race and social class or targets.

Characteristics of Target:					
Middle-Class White	47				
		Middle Class	87	White	50
Middle-Class Black	40				
Lower-Class White	3				
		Lower Class	13	Black	50
Lower-Class Black	10				
Chi Square:	16.80		16.13		0.00
P	.01		.01		

TABLE 3

Distribution of responses on Picture Sociometric Test according to characteristics of the subjects and characteristics of targets in percentages.

Characteristics of Target	Characteristics of S: Middle Class White	Middle Class Black	L Class White	Lower Class Black
PRETEST				
Middle-Class White	40	57	57	17
Middle-Class Black	20	14	14	17
Lower-Class White	20	28	28	67
Lower-Class Black	20	0	0	0
POSTTEST				
Middle-Class White	30	43	14	33
Middle-Class Black	50	29	43	17
Lower-Class White	10	29	43	50
Lower-Class Black	10	0	14	0

TABLE 4

Distribution of responses on Picture Sociometric Test according to characteristics of the targets th total sample, in percentages.

Characteristics of Targets	Pretest	Posttest
Middle-Class White	45	30
Middle-Class Black	17	37
Lower-Class White	33	27
Lower-Class Black	6	6
Chi square:	10.06	6.22
P <	.02	.20

TABLE 5

Distribution of responses on Picture Sociometric Text according to race of the targets and social class of the targets for the total sample, in percentages.

Rate of Targets:	Pretest	Posttest
Black	23	43
White	77	57
Chi Square:	8.53	1
P <	.05	N.S.
Social Class of Targets:	**Pretest**	**Posttest**
Middle Class	60	67
Lower Class	40	33
Chi Square:	1.20	3.34
P <	N.S.	.10

TABLE 6

Distribution of teacher judgments of playmates according tc social class of the subjects and social class of the targets in percentages.

PRETEST

	Social Class of Subjects	
	Middle Class	Lower Class
Social Class of Targets:		
Middle Class	82	30
Lower Class	18	70
Chi Square:	6.21	P< .02

POSTTEST

	Social Class of Subjects	
	Middle Class	Lower Class
Social Class of Targets:		
Middle Class	71	53
Lower Class	29	47
Chi Square:	1.00	N.S.

TABLE 7

Mean number of positive characteristics attributed to pictures of black children according to race and social class of subjects.

PRETEST				
		Middle Class	Lower Class	
White	n	10	8	18
	$\bar{X}$	11.90	6.83	9.67
Black	n	7	6	13
	$\bar{X}$	7.85	9.17	8.46
	n	17	14	
	$\bar{X}$	10.24	7.86	
POSTTEST				
		Middle Class	Lower Class	
White	n	10	8	18
	$\bar{X}$	7.50	6.13	6.89
Black	n	7	6	13
	$\bar{X}$	8000	8.17	8.08
	n	17	14	
	$\bar{X}$	7.71	7.00	